

# **EVOLUTION OF ARAB REVOLUTIONARY IDEOLOGY**

**Elias Farah**

## **A Note from the Co-Editor of Al-Moharer**

The Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party regards all Arabs as being part of one nation both in the cultural and spiritual sense. The different countries, in which they live, make up a politically and economically united homeland. In the Party's documents, the Arab homeland means all the Arab countries. Each of these is a "qotr" when translated, means country; in the Ba'ath context, it should be read as province or region.

The adjective "qotri" (provincial, regional) is used when referring to an individual country. The adjective "qawmi" (national), is used when referring to all the countries, which make up one homeland. Thus, the national leadership deals only with matters concerning the whole homeland. Each regional directorate deals with matters within its own country, for example, the Lebanese or Jordanian Regional Leadership.

The word Ba'ath can be translated as meaning revival, resurgence or renewal. Hitherto, resurgence seems to be the meaning which is preferred by Arab intellectuals and foreign Arab experts.

Dr. Elias Farah is a prominent Arab thinker who was very close to Michel Aflaq. He is the author of many books and articles on the subject of Arab Thoughts and Ideology, as advocated by the Ba'ath Party. Dr. Farah was able to explain the thoughts of Michel Aflaq and introduce them both nationally and internationally.

As Michel Aflaq said "Thought is itself a force in history and a priceless revolutionary one. The simple fact of inserting the Arab cause in the framework of global theory is a primary contribution towards enabling the Arab revolutionary movement to set out on a firm foundation..."

I was honored to know these great men and as a tribute to them and to the thoughts and ideology they carried, I will introduce some of their writings to the non-Arabic esteemed readers.

Revolutionary Regards,

**Ibrahim Ebeid**

## **Introduction**

To gauge the measure and the power of Arab revolutionary ideology and pierce its secret, we need only call to mind the conflicts which opposed the various ideologies prevalent in Arab territory throughout the history of the present Arab struggle, i.e. over the last quarter of a century.

On the one hand, the total inability of the previous dominant ideologies to grasp the reality of this particular phase of history stands revealed. These, in fact, succeeded in defining neither its essential contradictions nor the general laws imposed by the struggle, on which the life of the Nation hinges today. In other words, they proved incapable of perceiving the meaning of the polemics over the contemporary Arab experience or of understanding the bond linking it with the new revolutionary current in the countries of the Third World; here nations and proletarian masses —victims of injustice— have associated class-struggle against exploitation and under-development with the struggle for national freedom, in the face of colonialism and fragmentation.

On the other hand, this ideology, to which both a movement and a party are affiliated, has become the supreme guide for revolutionary action of the Arab Nation in its entirety, because it expresses faithfully and precisely the aspirations of the people and the proletarian Arab masses; it has, moreover, outlined the path for the Arab struggle and defined both its line of conduct and its objectives.

Arab revolutionary ideology has at last, after passing through various stages, reached maturity. It is now following its natural evolution, which will lead to full development and renewal and which corresponds to that of historic reality and thought in the Arab world.

A study of the evolution of Arab revolutionary ideology cannot be separated from the study of the movement which has developed and grown under its impetus. This ideology, while contributing to the success of the Arab revolutionary movement, was concerned with both the positive and negative experiments of the movement.

Arab revolutionary ideology crystallized and developed parallel to the movement's evolution. It was, therefore, inevitable that it should suffer the consequences of the crises shaking it. From the very outset, the practical application of the ideology with its watchwords Unity, Freedom and Socialism, brought about a crisis which revealed the backwardness of the Arab revolutionary movement in relation to its theory. In spite of attempts to draw the lesson from constant modifications, the movement was unable to master or amend the situation or change its course.

This backwardness of theory was the cause of the deterioration created by the political and economic changes which took place in certain Arab Regions during the sixties. Political and economic decisions, which have often been revised, lost their scientific revolutionary character; these were stamped by political opportunism and were devoid of socialist planification and a national dimension. Changes were, consequently, restricted to a few Regions, unrelated to the Nation as a whole, and were in opposition to the teaching of global Arab revolution. These changes appear as heterogeneous and

demagogic improvisations, unrelated to the revolutionary values on which Arab revolutionary ideology has always insisted, remained superficial and even discredited them in the eyes of the popular masses.

Opportunists and climbers, thinking only of themselves and the preservation of their own interests, made of power a counter-revolutionary force, in contradiction with the interests of the Arab revolution. During the sixties their role was confined to slowing down the activity of true militants — those who soldered their destiny to that of the Arab revolution and the proletarian masses, those who fought under the flag of Arab revolutionary ideology. Opportunists who spread confusion were, however, doomed to fail. They accused Arab revolutionary ideology of being the cause of their ill-success and taxed it with backwardness, inefficiency and obsolescence; they accused it of stagnation and made the doctrine out to be incapable of renewal. Their desire was to wrench it from its principles and alienate it from its vocation. They also attributed to it principles belonging elsewhere.

The state of uneasiness which followed on the failure of the experiment in unity (and revealed the need to return to the origins of the ideological crises which had shaken the Arab revolutionary movement) was accompanied by a feeling of resignation and, at the same time, by one of hatred for the movement itself. The latter became the target of attempts to destroy and defame it and of falsifications aiming at the annihilation of its strength. In other words, these maneuvers attacked the movement's ideology. Out of this state of things, confusion was born between a sincere desire for genuine renewal on the one hand and, on the other, attempts, hidden behind a call to resurgence, which were simply a parody and a deformation of truth.

The Arab revolutionary movement was unable to rise to the level required by its ideology, but the latter, on the other hand, was able to hold its ground at the level required by the particular phase in history. The movement, in fact, deviated from its own basic theory and failed to submit it to necessary study and analysis. Its analytical methods did not enable it to discover the close, reciprocal bonds which link together Unity, Freedom and Socialism, and it failed to solder these objectives indissolubly with a skilful tactical strategy for political struggle. The movement was kept prisoner by the very genius of its ideology — of which it was proud and which it continued to defend — without ever conjugating its efforts to fathom its real content. The day the movement was forced to go into action, it encountered a crisis which buffeted it just as much as its ideology. Those in power, who regarded the Arab revolutionary movement and its ideology as a means to their own ends and to ensure success, gave full rein to their hatred for the movement's ideology "like backward children who expect their father to provide for all their needs or like juvenile delinquents who commit crimes to revenge themselves on their fathers for giving them life".

Some of these offspring became professional liars and slanderers and tried to avenge themselves in a thousand and one ways on the ideology which forms the basis of the Arab revolutionary movement. The most treacherous of these was lip-service to the ideology, while doing everything possible to distort, destroy and plot against it.

The aim of our present study is to denounce the conspiracies being hatched against Arab revolutionary ideology and which try to deviate it from its vocation, retard its evolution and veil the contradictions which exist between Union in theory and its practical application in the framework of the Arab revolutionary experiment. It also aims at indicating the healthy, natural way for this experiment to evolve.

## **Ideology**

### **Dr. Elias Farah**

Our era is characterized by the accentuated importance of ideological strife. Many people are convinced that political action can only reach the level now required if basically consolidated by an ideological line, i.e. by a coherent system of thought known as an "ideology", capable of giving -specific direction to a human group. The word itself is relatively new. Previous to the Enlightenment (the century preceding the French Revolution), politics were defined as an occupation, activity or experience reserved for those who, at the King's command, carried out specific functions and conducted affairs of state.

In 1690, a book called "A Treatise concerning the true original extent and end of Civil Government" by the English philosopher John Locke, was published in London. Locke was a fierce opponent of both individual and absolute power and of the concept of divine right. In this work, he described the searching of conscience which was sweeping Europe at the time, and suggested a new ideological, political and critical orientation, which was the fruit and the expression of an ideology based on empiric philosophy, as already set out in his previous work, "An Essay concerning Humane Understanding".

The philosophic tendency which characterized the Enlightenment can be resumed in the five words:

1 – Individual

2 – Reason

3 – Nature

4 – Happiness

5 – Evolution

It differed from philosophical thought in the classical sense. It was not seeking abstract truth and it did not stop at pure theory, but sought rather the general direction of an ideology aspiring to realization in various domains of a profound change in human behavior. The French men-of-letters, Montesquieu, author of "L'Esprit des Lois" (Spirit

of the Laws) and Rousseau, author of "Le Contrat Social" (The Social Contract), laid the foundations of an ideology highlighting the greatness and hegemony of the People. In the same way, the slogan of the French Revolution "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" opened the way to ideological tendencies which were to leave their mark on the 18th century. It was Napoleon, apparently, in a spirit of disparagement and contempt, who coined the word "ideology" to designate theoretical reasoning unrelated to fact. It was not until the 20th century that the notion of "ideology" began to clarify and diverge to some extent from abstract philosophic concepts and metaphysical speculations and began to define comprehensive ideas on which society could be based. These ideas take into consideration the evolution of history and act upon it indirectly through the political organizations which adopt them.

"The Encyclopedia of the 20th Century", published in 1931, defines ideology as "a system of ideas taking form in political or social belief and inspiring the actions of a government or a particular party". In Lalande's "Vocabulaire Technique et Critique de la Philosophie" (6th edition, 1958) the Marxist interpretation of the word "ideology" is given as "a thought which expresses the vital interests of a particular social class".

In the Larger Soviet Encyclopedia we find a Marxist-Leninist definition: - "Ideology is the science concerned with study of the laws governing natural and social evolution". This definition corresponds to a coherent and finalized entity, with which the working class and communist workers' parties all over the world claim kinship.

In his book "Les Ideologies Ne'gro-Africaines d'Au-jourdhui", published in Paris in 1965, L.V. Thomas gives a more elaborate series of definitions:

1 - Ideology, in its wider meaning, is a system of ideas to which a social group is affiliated, and which expresses just as much the centers of interest as the interests of the group.

2 - Ideology, in its restricted meaning, is "a system of ideas elaborated with a view to action, expressing a particular vision of reality and acting as an impetus to change and transform the actual state of things".

3 - Used derogatorily, ideology is "an unattainable mythical ideal, either well behind or well in advance of reality". This is Karl Marx's definition. (Ibid).

In the light of these definitions, ideology appears as a system of ideas, a vision of the world and of the state of society, which can serve as a basis for any common action. It bears no resemblance to individual thought -having neither its elasticity nor its malleability - because it constitutes a programme of action. The distance separating ideology and philosophy is comparable to that which separates applied and pure science. Ideology is primarily concerned with political and social science, but is in no way limited to these fields. We can now make a distinction between two different types of ideology — between partial and global ideology and between religious, nationalist, fascist, democratic, bourgeois, socialist, liberal, communist and subversive versions.

To tell the truth, ideology, in its accepted definition, prepares the foundation of a "party".

At the beginning of the 19th century, the concept of ideology began to take form. In the middle of the 20th century, parties founded on a particular ideology came into being. Ideology acts as an intermediary between religion, philosophy and science on the one hand and society on the other. No social re-birth can dispense with it, for it helps to concretize the global image of reality. It enables us to situate the context of an evolutionary stage within society and also to place it in relation to global evolution and the whole of humanity.

The concept of ideology has evolved. Mannheim has emphasized several aspects of this in his work "Ideology and Utopia", in dealing with the transition from the phase of partial to that of global ideology (in other words, to a global vision of the universe) and presenting ideology as a subject for study in a new scientific branch —sociological knowledge<sup>1</sup>.

During the 19th century, Marxism was able to extirpate ideology from its Utopian framework and to confer on it scientific status.

At a later date, the Third World underwent experiences enabling it to elaborate ideologies as a result of reflection and a struggle to evolve sound theory in the very areas of the world most exposed to injustice, where the most extreme aspects of fragmentation and under-development are encountered, thereby constituting the most favorable conditions for the outbreak of revolution.

These experiences helped to consolidate ideology and added an even stronger revolutionary content, with a more sincere, more realistic and more human aspect. Ideology was no longer a static collection of ideas and prejudices; it had become a kind of dialectic, an expression of the unity of theory and practice — of theoretical and practical strife.

## **Present-Day Societies are Ideological Entities**

In so far as they are ideological entities, present-day societies, by the very evolution and nature of our era, are characterized by the presence of several ideological currents — all the more so in countries going through revolutionary stages. For them revolution is not simply a political and social phenomenon, but is the bearer of a civilizing, cultural and intellectual mission. It radically transforms both the vision and concept of life in relation to a given society and the values on which it is based. Revolutionary ideology is born during the period of transition which prepares society to attain another way of life — a new way destined to efface the traces of all that went before. This is the ineluctable issue for any nation engaging in a fight against colonialism, fragmentation, under-development and class-exploitation in all its forms. As Jacques Arnould reminds us in his book, "Du Colonialisme au Socialisme", the principal characteristic of major revolutions is that the

renewal of social, economic and political structures is not for them an end in itself. This thirst for renewal tends to produce another kind of man, heralded and introduced by the new ideology. It is for this reason that all revolutionary movements, regardless of their tendencies, confer on ideology, unequivocally, the role of the matrix of history.

Although considering modes of production as the foundation of all doctrine, dialectical materialism emphasizes the importance of revolutionary awareness and of the principle that the individual attains freedom through his recognition of the laws governing historic and social evolution. In the same way, schools which believe in the intervention of matter, instinct, and biology, and behavior, physical and social environment are in agreement in conferring on ideology a primary role in human experience today. The revolutionary character of a transitional phase, during which radical mutations take place, brings into evidence an ideology's universal nature; it deepens and spreads because it reflects the awakening of a global, general awareness. Ideology is thus a vital necessity, inherent in the very nature of a transitional phase, and an inspiration to the revolutionary and popular vanguard. In the measure that class-structure and vanguard organization incarnate revolutionary ideology with a maximum of fidelity, political action and the ideological standpoint adopted increase in stature and become endowed with a historic, civilizing message.

Ideological frailty and lack of strategic perspectives, on the contrary, reduce political action to superficial tactical operations, incapable of an effective impact on reality. There are many incidents in history to illustrate this truth. In Russia during the 19th and 20th centuries, many revolutionaries confined themselves to political action and partial reforms, having at their disposal neither strategy nor a well-thought-out revolutionary ideology and were, in consequence, doomed to failure. They were content with revolt against standing social and political frameworks, and this enabled the communist movement to triumph, because it was in a position to overthrow traditional dogmas. It even succeeded in freeing minds and hearts from the sequels of the preceding phase, and enriching militant action with an integral revolutionary vision and an organization created within the framework of a definitive revolutionary strategy.

## **Theory, Strategy and Practice**

**Strategy:** Strategy is the general political tenet from which devolves a revolutionary movement aiming at the realization of essential objectives during a specific period in history.

**Tactics:** These are the political policy which corresponds to a relatively short phase; they trace out the path for the revolutionary movement and establish its direction.

If they are to assume the ideological and historic aspect of their mission—in other words, raise policy to the level of revolutionary action and endow it with a historic mission—political leaders must not base themselves on revolutionary ideology alone, but also on

scientific analysis and strategy. They are then in a position to analyze conditions and a given situation objectively and so guarantee the success of an undertaking.

Political strategy is a scientific and practical expression of reality, evolving in the direction which offers the means to concretize revolutionary ideological data, and to furnish a scientific explanation of the evolution of social reality. The ability to control such evolution depends essentially on political strategy. It follows, therefore, that any political strategy of a scientific revolutionary nature must be buttressed by a theory capable of grasping social evolution in its entirety during a specific phase in history. It is, therefore, of capital importance for political strategy to build on a precise ideological foundation; it can then abandon the confused, empirical domain of improvisation and rise to the level of revolutionary, scientific action, taking into account the march of history and the laws governing social evolution. The fact of drawing inspiration from a particular ideology guarantees it from deteriorating into a straight-forward tactical operation, i.e. an adaptation to conditions not yet integrated by ideology. The absence of a link between theory and strategy transforms tactics into strategy — into a kind of chronic illness, resulting from total submission to practical necessity, and preventing a vision of social evolution during a given period of history. Strategy thus finds itself amputated from its ethics and deprived of its fundamental values, reduced to maneuvers, opportunism and partial solutions<sup>2</sup>.

On the other hand, the bond uniting political strategy and revolutionary ideology confers on the revolutionary movement the aptitude to foresee contradictions, i.e. to anticipate events and revise alliances before it is too late. In this way, a revolutionary movement avoids being left on the fringe of events, avoids blunders and formulae tending to abolish its revolutionary character. Political strategy draws, from ideology, its ability to interpret incomplete phenomena; and thanks to ideology that the whole is not sacrificed to the part. Theory is enriched, in turn, by close contact with the evolution of reality in its relation to political strategy. Mutual interdependence and interaction between strategy and ideology constitute a basis on which unity of theory and practice in revolutionary action can stand firm. From strategy they draw an inexhaustible source of riches for the benefit of theory, and a perennial source of discovery for revolutionary thought, and enable the latter to evolve as a result of its permanent contact with every-day reality. They equally enable ideology to follow without interruption the general, historic evolution of the Nation and the period. If this interaction, this link between political strategy and ideology is to bear fruit, a third condition is absolutely necessary: a revolutionary organization, combining originality of theory, strategic prudence and wisdom and organic soundness, must exist. This condition fulfilled, the party is in a position to put its theory into practice and control events, to hand on its knowledge to the masses and benefit from their support. The creation of the link between strategy and ideology is, therefore, a vital necessity and a *sine qua non* in the elaboration of an "organizational theory", its structure and essential content drawing inspiration from ideology and its details conforming to political strategy. This binding link can only be consolidated when objective conditions are found to be ripe for large-scale revolutionary action. Then is the time for the transition to the phase characterized by strategic and ideological action to take place. Tactics then adopt a strategy in conformity with the moral and practical values exacted by theory.



The success of liberation experiments of a national and social order in the Third World—which constitute, in the highest sense of the word, the framework of a revolutionary stage—is to be attributed essentially to the link connecting theory, strategy and tactics. Nationalist and socialist movements can only acquire a historic revolutionary character in the Third World if they fill their ideological gap. They will have to crystallize a new revolutionary ideology, capable of forestalling change and explaining important contradictions. Only in this way can they eliminate definitively the dregs of traditional and incomplete revolutionary ideologies, which deal with a single aspect—among so many others—of the problems of nations and proletarian masses, who are the victims of injustice and exploitation in this part of the world.

### Notes

1 - Barrion: *What is Ideology?*, translated by As'ad Rizq: Beirut -1971

2 - Cf. *Introduction to the Political Report of the XXth National Congress*, p. 10